

Dads Matter

Understanding CAFCASS

A Guide to Navigating the Interview & Reporting Process

Date: 2026

For many fathers, interacting with **CAFCASS** (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) is the most anxiety-inducing part of family proceedings. It is entirely normal to feel nervous. They hold significant influence over the judge's final decision.

However, approaching CAFCASS with a defensive, hostile, or overly anxious mindset is counterproductive. This guide is designed to demystify their role, explain the process, and teach you how to present yourself as a calm, reasonable, and resolutely child-focused father.

1. What is CAFCASS and What is Their Role?

First and foremost: **CAFCASS does not represent you, and they do not represent your ex-partner. They represent the child.**

Their statutory duty is to safeguard and promote the welfare of children going through the family justice system. They act as the eyes and ears of the Family Court. A judge will heavily rely on their recommendations because CAFCASS officers are trained social workers with expertise in child welfare.

The Two Main Stages of CAFCASS Involvement

1. The Initial Safeguarding Stage (Schedule 2)

When a C100 application is submitted, CAFCASS is automatically notified. Before the First Hearing Dispute Resolution Appointment (FHDRA), they will:

- Conduct police and local authority (Social Services) background checks on both parents.
- Conduct a short telephone interview with both parents (usually 15–30 minutes).
- Write a short “Safeguarding Letter” to the court, advising if there are any immediate safety concerns (domestic abuse, substance misuse, etc.) and recommending the next steps.

2. The Section 7 Report (If Ordered)

If the case cannot be resolved at the first hearing, or if there are welfare concerns that need investigating, the judge may order a *Section 7 Report*. This is an in-depth investigation. A CAFCASS officer will usually interview both parents again (often in person), may speak to the child (depending on their age), and might contact schools or doctors. They will then write a detailed report making final recommendations for contact and residency.

2. Preparing for Your Interview

Whether it is a 20-minute phone call or a 2-hour in-person meeting for a Section 7 report, your mindset and preparation are crucial.

The Golden Rule: Treat the CAFCASS officer as a professional who is trying to figure out what is best for your child. **Do not** treat them as an enemy, a therapist, or a judge you need to convince that your ex-partner is a terrible person.

How to Frame Your Answers

You must shift your vocabulary away from “My Rights” and towards “My Child’s Needs.”

- **Instead of saying:** *“She won’t let me see my kids, and I have a right as their father to 50/50 custody.”*
- **Say:** *“I am deeply concerned that the children are missing out on their relationship with me. It is important for their emotional development to have a meaningful bond with both parents.”*

3. The Do's and Don'ts of the Interview

THE DO'S: Actions that Build Credibility

- **Do listen carefully:** Answer the specific question asked. Do not go off on tangents about the history of your relationship.
- **Do remain perfectly calm:** Even if the officer brings up false allegations made by your ex-partner. Take a breath, state calmly that the allegation is untrue, and return the focus to the child.
- **Do acknowledge your own flaws (lightly):** A parent who claims to be perfect is unbelievable. Saying, *"Separation has been stressful, and I haven't always communicated perfectly, but I am committed to improving our co-parenting for the kids,"* shows maturity and self-reflection.
- **Do praise the other parent (where possible):** Acknowledging that the mother is good at certain things (e.g., *"She has always been great at helping them with homework"*) makes you look incredibly reasonable and child-focused.

THE DON'TS: Actions that Damage Your Case

- **Don't bash your ex-partner:** If you spend the whole interview attacking the mother's character, CAFCASS will note that you are "hostile," "unable to co-parent," or "putting adult disputes ahead of the child's needs."
- **Don't interrupt:** Let the officer finish speaking. Treat them with utmost respect.
- **Don't focus on money:** Child maintenance and financial settlements are generally completely irrelevant to CAFCASS (unless lack of money directly impacts the child's physical safety). Do not complain about how much money you pay.
- **Don't bring up the past unless it is a direct safeguarding risk:** CAFCASS looks forward, not backward. They care about what the routine should be *tomorrow*, not an argument you had three years ago.

4. What If You Disagree With the Report?

When you receive the CAFCASS letter or report, it is highly likely you will read things you disagree with. It may contain statements from your ex-partner that you know are false.

- 1. Do not call CAFCASS to argue.** They will not rewrite the report because you are angry. Calling them aggressively will only result in a further negative note being added to your file.
- 2. Look for factual errors vs. differences of opinion.** If they got your child's date of birth wrong, or stated you have a criminal record when you do not, you can politely write to point out the factual error.
- 3. Prepare for Court.** If you disagree with their ultimate recommendation, the place to challenge it is in the courtroom, through your Position Statement or by cross-examining the CAFCASS officer if they are called to give evidence.

Important Legal Disclaimer

This primer provides peer-to-peer guidance based on lived experience and should not be construed as professional legal advice. The **Dads Matter** network strongly encourages all fathers to seek the counsel of a qualified family law solicitor whenever possible.

Need further support?

Reach out to your local hub leader or visit our national website for more resources, forums, and guidance.

www.dadsmatter.org.uk